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ABSTRACT

In "The Prince" Machiavelli offers a cool, practical and unsentimental look at what man is. He offers hands-on instruction for achieving stability and a well-run principality. Whether or not Shakespeare read "The Prince," which was not translated until years after the playwright's death, the book's principles were generally in circulation in Renaissance England. Many of Shakespeare's plays with evident Machiavellian precepts can be used in a humanities course. In examining "Macbeth," "Measure for Measure," "All's Well that Ends Well," "Hamlet," "The Tempest," "Richard III," "Coriolanus," "Henry V," and "Julius Caesar," three particular areas of Machiavellian thought are evident: (1) virtu; (2) separation of politics and ethics; and (3) how a new ruler ought to act. These three areas are often mixed closely together and it is not always possible to separate them cleanly in discussions of character. Clearly, Shakespeare was at heart a conservative who believed wholeheartedly in the stability of the social order and who had a deep mistrust of crowds and their abilities to govern themselves or anyone else. According to Shakespeare's thinking, a stable, secure society was one that recognized the social hierarchy and abided by it; murder, mayhem, and anarchy were the inevitable results of tampering with it. That harsh actions were sometimes required to maintain this social hierarchy was something that Shakespeare and Machiavelli alike recognized. (A resource bibliography for a seminar on Shakespeare's plays is attached.) (TB)

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Machiavellian Precepts

in

Shakespeare's Plays

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In *The Prince* Machiavelli offers us a cool, practical and unsentimental look at what man is, acknowledging that we are governed by the base instinct of self-interest, rather than the fuzzy altruism which theologians hope to see. Machiavelli offers a hands-on instruction manual for achieving stability and a well-run principality. He discards the mists of idealism and lays out a path of pragmatic justification which reaches down the ages to Nagasaki and Hiroshima. To what extent Machiavelli offers an exemplar of one aspect of a complex age is a debate for another forum. What interests us here is the question of how/if Machiavelli's thought directly influenced the great English dramatist born nearly 40 years after his death, William Shakespeare

The Prince was not officially translated into English until 1640 - 17 years after Shakespeare's own death - but there is no doubt that it was known of and discussed long before that - sometimes reviled, sometimes applauded just as it is today. There is general agreement amongst scholars that Queen Elizabeth knew of *The Prince* and approved heartily of it, but then she was as fluent in Italian as she was in French, Greek and Latin, so the question of translation would have been irrelevant to her. The great Richard Hooker, who died in 1600, quoted from it as did Bacon, both approvingly, and many modern critics believe they can detect direct influences not only in a wide range of Elizabethan and Stewart literature but also in the new philosophy and a notable change of direction of public policy after James' succession. The Renaissance instituted a change of relationship between man and God, forcing man to be responsible for his own outcome - a new opportunity for tragedy of a different sort - the self-made sort So it can be argued that the late Tudor period was one of instability with the crumbling of the mediaeval sense of security and precursors of the new Cartesian and Calvanist uncertainties, a new concept of a detached and indifferent God. In place of Providence or Fate, man must now cultivate his own *virtú*. The sense of being thrown back on one's own devices can be very unsettling as we see in Hamlet: "To be, or not to be/That is the question. . . ", or Lear's realization that he is ". . . not ague proof". Generally speaking Shakespearean drama shows man and politics shaped not by the Aristotelian *City of God* but the Machiavellian concept of *virtú* and dependence on one's own cunning and ability.

As for Shakespeare - who knows? As in so much about him, although it is hard to miss the evidence of Machiavellian thought in the plays as a whole, we do not know whether he would have read it in manuscript. Indeed those who believe that the plays were written by someone other than the man from Stratford argue that only a university educated man could have read Machiavelli in Italian manuscript and that the uneducated rustic from a country market town could not have done so; but then they also argue that he could not have read Hakluyt, Holinshed or Ovid or any of the other sources so obvious and evident throughout the work. Germaine Greer says:

> . . . more painstaking sifting of Tudor historiography showed that he had consulted virtually all of the available sources, including some which existed only in manuscript, some never translated from the French or Latin, and some which had never been written down at all but survived by oral transmission. (76)

And G.K. Hunter says Shakespeare may well have read Machiavelli since: "He seems to have read widely, perhaps desultorily . . ". Scholars and critics seem evenly divided on the subject - as usual, and frankly I'm not sure how relevant it is whether the great William Shakespeare, whoever he was, actually read in Italian, or Latin, or English the tracts of Machiavelli or anyone else. Other scholars, and I think I lean towards this view myself, argue that the new pragmatism was "in the air". Surely it would be enough

for him to listen, to discuss, to argue and distill the elements into his craft? Whatever the origin, osmosis from the *Zeitgeist*, or discussion over cakes and ale, all was grist to the mill for our Johannes Factotum However he acquired this knowledge, there is no doubt that a Machiavellian appreciation of man's self-interest as a ruling principle illuminates many of the character studies and situations in Shakespearean dramas.

Now, I shall concentrate on some aspects of Machiavelli's thought and some of Shakespeare's plays. To analyze each play in terms of its Machiavellian overtones would be the topic of a book. This discussion is designed merely to suggest texts which might be used in a Humanities course, and possible ways of entering into consideration of Machiavellian precepts within those texts.

What particular influences then can we see, or should we look for? Self-interest; pragmatism; *virtú* - that old fashioned word so difficult to define today when most of what it stands for no longer exists; politics; strategies of war and armament; behavior after conquest and so on and so on - all can be discovered in the plays without too much effort. Almost all the plays show clear evidence of Machiavellian ideas - all the histories, most of the so-called problem plays and several of the comedies. In fact it might be more interesting to look for one that doesn't! What is interesting though, is that often the theory is illuminated negatively, and by that I mean that the pragmatic action is illustrated by its absence. For example, when a character makes a wrong decision, in Machiavellian terms, we see the havoc that ensues. We are being shown, contrariwise, what he should have done for a different result. We see Machiavellian principles at work *in absentia* as it were.

I shall, therefore, concentrate on three particular aspects of Machiavelli's ideas as expounded in *The Prince*: ***virtú***, **separation of politics and ethics**, and the **best actions to take for a ruler who has recently usurped the position of authority**. These three are often mixed closely together and it is not always possible to separate them cleanly in discussion of character. Indeed, to adhere to the characteristics of *virtú* it is often necessary to make use of the other two precepts. Some characters show one attribute above all others; often characters may hold and then lose specific aspects of *virtú*, many display a cynical disregard for ethics when political matters become pressing; and often the action of the play depends on whether the character can exercise cruelty in an isolated instance without succumbing to the temptation to see it as a permanent way out of his problems.

Machiavelli placed great emphasis on the quality of *virtú* which, ideally, should be balanced by *bonta*. Alan Gilbert's translation has several footnotes regarding the difficulty of finding a suitable modern equivalent of either word. He says, in one instance:

> Strength and wisdom render the single word *virtú*, which is not equivalent to the English virtue, as now generally understood. Commonly Machiavelli uses the word as did his contemporaries and predecessors as far back as Dante. If he is in any way exceptional, it is that now and then he gives it more suggestion of moral excellence than was usual. For the most part, the word has little ethical suggestion, or none at all.. (58, footnote)

John Plamenatz points out:

> Writers in English about Machiavelli often speak of *virtú* rather than virtue, hoping that the use of the Italian word will lead to less misunderstanding... The Italian word and the English

> one have both changed their meanings considerably since Machiavelli's time when they were morally more neutral and closer to their common original, the Latin *virtus*.
>
> (18, footnote)

There is then an important point for us to bear in mind and on which to prepare students *virtú* may have nothing to with goodness, or moral/ethical behavioral qualities that we today associate with virtue.

Additionally, Plamenatz adds that the word "does not refer always to the same quality or combination of qualities". In stressing the variance of the word as used by Machiavelli, Plamenatz offers the following as some of the definitions that can be deduced from the word *virtú* at different times:

> public spirit; respect for the law; fortitude in adversity;
> foresight and insight; willingness to take risks;
> resourcefulness; firmness of purpose. (P.19)

If *virtú* can only be appreciated by the twentieth century as a portmanteau of elusive definitions, the Renaissance understood it without difficulty and Shakespeare offers us examples of men with *virtú* and of those without. As in real life, few carry all the ideals itemized by Plamenatz and at different times they will display different aspects of *virtú*.

Prince Hal, Julius Caesar, Brutus, Richard III and to a lesser degree, Theseus in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and Solinus in *The Comedy of Errors* are considered to have most of them, most of the time. Macbeth, Hamlet, Lear, and Antony in *Antony and Cleopatra* on the whole do not, although they may show some of them some of the time. Antony in *Julius Caesar* shows many of the virtues suggested by Plamenatz: public spirit; willingness to take risks; firmness of purpose, for example. Later, in *Antony and Cleopatra*, he has lost them all and, from this Machiavellian point of view, has become degenerate. Richard III displays all except the first two. He does not hesitate to use "bruised arms" and "stern alarums" (I,i,6 and 7) to acquire the kingdom or to 'put away' the young princes - all these are necessary in his eyes to the maintenance of the power structure of the kingdom. Machiavelli says:

> A wise prince, then, is not troubled about a reproach for cruelty by which he keeps his subjects united and loyal because, giving a very few examples of cruelty, he is more merciful than those who, through too much mercy, let evils continue, from which result murders or plunder because the latter commonly harm a whole group, but those executions that come from the prince harm individuals only. The new prince - above all other princes -cannot escape being called cruel, since new governments abound in dangers. (104)

In Machiavellian thought it was obviously not considered a heinous crime to dispose of any future sources of contention but practical sense. Richard III reputedly murdered the Yorkist Princes who were possible centers of future revolts but I will deal later with some of the problems I have in regarding Richard III as an example of *virtú*. Examples of this principle being illustrated in reverse or in its absence are Claudius who did not murder Hamlet; Antonio who did not murder Prospero; Macbeth who did not murder Duncan's sons and whose failure to do so caused his eventual downfall.

MACBETH

Both Shakespeare and history give us in Macbeth an example of a man who had *virtú* and lost it. In his early years he helped Duncan in maintaining law and order by taking "stern measures" to discipline rebellious clans but after the regicide, although he began by ruling benevolently, the "conscience of his hideous deeds" changed his mildness to ruthlessness. In Shakespeare's play he possesses none of the ideals on the Plamentaz list and is led by the witches and propelled by his wife. Unlike Cesare Borgia, his cruelty brought no beneficial effects to the State and he inspired hatred rather than fear. Muir quotes Buchanan:

> Macbeth was a man of penetrating genius, a high spirit, unbounded ambition, and, if he had possessed moderation, was worthy of any command, however, great; but in punishing crimes he exercised a severity which, exceeding the bounds of the laws, appeared oft to degenerate into cruelty.

Machiavelli accepts that cruelty is necessary in a new ruler but insists it must be "judicious" (p.104) and clearly Shakespeare's Macbeth was not judicious in his use of cruelty. Machiavelli is quite clear that whereas the wise ruler should make sure he is feared he should, at the same time, ensure he is not hated since that only causes problems and does not comprise *virtú*. It would appear to be a Shakespearean embroidery that Macbeth's excesses are influenced by occult means but the means do not obscure the problem.

MEASURE FOR MEASURE

In *Measure for Measure* we have the Duke as an embodiment of *virtú* in all its meanings. His authority is both secular and religious and he exercises it with temperance and restraint. He displays public spirit and respect for the law; L.W. Lever excuses Vincentio's use of guile to foil Angelo's designs as justifiable application of "craft against vice" (lxxxi) because it was done to protect an innocent subject. He suggests that the Duke applies "principle and practice [to avoid] a near-tragic situation". Nothing could be more in the mode of Machiavelli's Prince. Displaying foresight and insight, Vincentio was not over-trusting - he held grave suspicions about Angelo, hence the device of being absent on a long journey, giving Angelo the opportunity to reveal his true colors ; he exposed a vice - Angelo's hypocritical unsuitability for a position of power; he became recognized as a ruler to be feared and respected; and while displaying firmness of purpose, he yet manages to dispense mercy in the great tradition of the true Prince.

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Comedy of Errors*, Theseus and Solinus both are prepared to uphold the law even though such action initially makes them appear cruel and heartless. However, each displays resourcefulness in offering an escape route to his victim (Theseus/Hermia; Solinus/Egeon), foresight and insight into the essential good character of the victim which allows fortune to provide him with an opportunity to exercise *bonta* or mercy and appear to comply with Machiavelli's assertion that "... every sensible prince wishes to be considered merciful and not cruel".

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL

One of the strangest plays in the canon is *All's Well That Ends Well.* Strange - difficult - complicated are words often used about it. It is ". . . not a play that is often read or performed, and in the rare occasions when it is seen or heard, it does not seem to give much general pleasure" (G.K. Hunter xxix). For the purposes of this seminar, I cannot divert into the many intriguing aspects of the play but in order to make my point re Machiavellian influences here, I need to 'fess up about my own interpretation - or one of them.

For me, *All's Well* is an inverted Romance Quest; inverted because with wicked tongue in cheek, Shakespeare has reversed the roles of the woman and the man. Remembering that the woman is played in any case by a young man, and that the reversal is not made obvious as in *As You Like It* for instance, I cannot help but think that the Bard was having a joke on all of us. Helena is the Romance hero, facing perils and overcoming difficulties to get her prize; she undertakes a pilgrimage and uses the recognized and honored mediaeval bed trick to achieve her version of the Grail. Bertram becomes the woman: petulant, spoiled, easily led astray and, in the end, meekly submissive. What sort of future they had after the final curtain would have been worth a play of its own, and I confess to moments of wild surmise as to whether this was an extension of Shakespeare's own experience: did Anne Hathaway pursue him to the altar?? Ah, we'll never know.

Back to Machiavelli. Given my perhaps idiosyncratic interpretation of the play, it seems to me that it is Helena who displays the most Machiavellian characteristics. Bertram illustrates them in the negative by being nothing like a Prince - and look what happens to him! The King is sick, weakly, and ineffectual - a mere figurehead for the princely virtues he is supposed to embrace. Helena, however, has few illusions about her fellows or herself. She knows what she wants and schemes her path to getting it. First she must gain herself some political recognition and power, which she does by curing the King's ulcers. No Prince can operate without a power base and Helena sets hers on two strong supports: the King and the Countess, Bertram's mother. Two powerful allies indeed.

Having fitted herself with this power base and usurped the position of the male hero, it can be argued that Helena is now in the position of Machiavelli's Prince who has newly achieved dominion over his city state. Now the plans are put in motion. Bertram is spirited away to war by Parolles, the evil angel, or the Vice of the Morality plays, leading him into depravity and temptation, illustrating like a photographic negative all the pitfalls that a weak leader falls into. Helena must play the role of *virtú*, showing strength, determination and, when her shame-faced fiancé is finally brought to heel, dispensing mercy with deceptively submissive grace.

In *All's Well That Ends Well* Bertram displays little *virtú* and no *bonta*. He is brave on the battlefield, which is good for the State but he is proud and unforgiving in domestic matters. He shows none of the moral excellence that Gilbert suggests Machiavelli sometimes adds to the word; what Machiavellian characteristics there are, lie firmly in Helena's control.

HAMLET

For example let's look at *Hamlet* the play, where we see one of the examples of "negative" Machiavellianism, and its disastrous consequences. If Claudius wanted to make a success of usurpation, he should have had Hamlet killed at university or on the journey home to prevent him reaching Elsinore

and becoming a possible focal point for trouble. As the only son, Hamlet was the obvious lightening rod and should have been eliminated immediately and quickly. Instead, Claudius lets him come home, and when belatedly he does decide to act, chooses those ineffectual tools Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, thus leaving the door open for tragedy and eventual carnage. Machiavelli says that a new ruler should determine the injuries he will need to inflict and inflict them once and for all. "Whoever acts otherwise, either through timidity or bad advice, is always forced to have the knife ready in his hand." We see a similar scenario in Macbeth, where Macbeth allows Duncan's sons to leave, and waits too long before attacking MacDuff and the other nobles - and look what happens to him and his wife in the end!

The Tempest.

I believe that the same thing can be seen in *The Tempest*. It is clear from the text that Prospero was a pretty useless ruler of Milan, shutting himself away with his books and leaving his brother to do all the real work. When Antonio decided to make his move and reap the title and benefits of ruler as recompense for the hard work he'd been doing for so long, he should have arranged a nice quiet accident for Prospero, rather than making a half-hearted gesture of banishment, especially given the nature of Prospero's studies. As it is, in his weakness or perhaps sentimental feelings for family, he leaves the way open for the return of an ineffectual and petulant ruler and Milan loses the services of a competent and able one. One can almost see Machiavelli shaking his head in dismay at Antonio's lack of decisive action. Prospero seems to have displayed little *virtú* during his rulership, sacrificing his responsibilities to his private desires, and none of the qualities identified by Plamenatz. On the Island, his position seems debatable: is he punishing Alonso and the courtiers because it must be done for their good and the future prosperity of the State, or for his own revenge?

It would seem then that the actions of a ruler (King, Prince, or Duke) in wielding power ruthlessly were not necessarily seen as evil in Renaissance times. Necessity and ***integrity of intent*** could be used to excuse apparent crimes and, indeed, perhaps 'integrity of intent' is a useful phrase in conveying the ideas contained in the word *virtú*. As Greer points out, the first rule of Machiavelli could be: the sovereign's first duty to the crown is to make sure he keeps it". In Shakespeare many rulers fail to do that: Richard II, is a prime example Henry V, on the other hand, is determined to keep his crown and live up to the demands it makes upon him..

Separation of Politics and Ethics

There are, of course, places where we are shown the principles in positive action. For instance, Machiavelli separates politics and ethics and Shakespeare provides numerous instances of such policy in this Machiavellian sense - e.g. *Timon of Athens* - and instances where the interests of the state supersede principles of morality - e.g. *Troilus and Cressida*. In many of the Roman plays, for example, we see action taking place in the forum - a site of both order and disorder; a place where great deeds are planned and terrible ones enacted. Brutus can undertake for the good of the State "the acting of a dreadful thing" (II,i,63) in spite of his personal revulsion. He even sees the battle within himself as a microcosm of the greater war: "and the state of man,/Like to a little kingdom, suffers then/The nature of an insurrection" (I.67-69). Both Prince Hal and Brutus show Machiavellian *virtú* by being prepared to act for the good of the state against personal predilections.

We see this sharp division between politics and ethics particularly in *Coriolanus* where we are treated to the comic acting out of the parable of the belly - whereby the state is likened to the human body and each part must function to maintain the health of the whole. We see Menenius entering into the spirit of rough badinage with the plebeians, each side knowing their own place on the social ladder and able to accept it with humor and a certain amount of good will because that is the way to keep the state on an even keel, to maintain the health of the body politic. Ethics do not come into it at all, it is pure politics.

Then enters Coriolanus; in spite of his heroic nature he is totally unable to act the part of good fellowship with the working class, his speech and actions are rude and rough much as a general would address his soldiers in the field. He despises the crowd and they know it. He will not dissemble and pretend to be what he is not; he will not bow his arrogant and noble head in a greeting which is palpably insincere. Ethics have entered and the politics are in disarray.

The crowd turns against Coriolanus and his opportunities for election to high office, his by every right except that of dissimulation, are blown sky high. Machiavelli warns: "The fact is that a man who wants to act virtuously in every way necessarily comes to grief among so many who are not virtuous" (ch.15) Coriolanus embodies the spirit of *virtú* in many its noble aspects - valiant in battle; fortitude in adversity; firmness of purpose; uncompromising in integrity; patriotic to a fault; noble by birth; a man of action - more brawn than brains perhaps. Only when he tries to be a dutiful son - and allows a moment of human weakness to appear, does the heroic mold crack. Coriolanus embodies all that becomes a noble Roman and yet, his heart is missing, he is lonely and alone. Perhaps this is the fate of all heroes? What, of course, Coriolanus lacks to be a perfect hero, is patience, a lack he shares with Lear and Othello, to name the two who come most immediately to mind.

The blunt honesty of Coriolanus in refusing to dissemble appears crass rudeness in contrast with the other senators who are prepared to play to the crowd in public and denigrate them in private. Machiavelli also says : "Since it is difficult to join them together, it is safer to be feared than loved when one of the two must be lacking (ch.17). Coriolanus' problem is that he just doesn't care two hoots whether the plebeians love or fear him; they are so far out of his picture of life that their opinions have absolutely no relevance. Of course, eventually he is persuaded of his error but only compounds it when he tries to act against his nature but his essential integrity will not allow him to carry through the deception. To such an uncompromising nature even the act of treason can be justified as an act of patriotism. Coriolanus can be read as a play about what happens when ethics and politics come face to face. As with most oxymorons, the result is not harmonious.

RICHARD III

In Chapter 8 Machiavelli considers the instances of a prince gaining power by wicked deeds but concludes:

> It cannot, however, be called virtue to kill one's fellow-citizens, to betray friends, to be without fidelity, without mercy, without religion, (81)

This would seem to invalidate Richard III's claim, but on the other hand Machiavelli says more than once: "... first, he wipes out the family of their long-established prince" (61).

Shakespeare's Richard schemes his way to the crown, eschewing ethics right from the start – if indeed he even considered them. In speaking of the Histories, Greer points out that Shakespeare weaves together ". . . the huge themes of right and wrong rule, of kingship as divine office and a Machiavellian political institution. . . " but I'm not totally convinced that Richard fits the bill.

There is no doubt of Richard's unpopularity either before he usurps the throne or after. This is made clear by Anne in I.ii, and indeed he acknowledges it himself in I.i.37. He admits to not knowing pity, I.iii.72 and to ". . . seem a saint when most I play the devil". (I.iv.338). He acts swiftly to dispatch all who stand between him and the throne (Machiavelli would have approved of that). Hastings must be executed before dinner:

> I will not dine until I see the same [Hasting's head]" . . .
> Come , come dispatch: the Duke would be at dinner;
> Make a short shrift: he longs to see your head." (III.v.77 and 94-95).

Richard dissembles continuously, at one level appearing to seek love and approval but in reality caring little so long as he gets what he wants. The amazing thing is that all the other characters don't seem to realize what is going on. They see all around them falling, with Richard always in the wings, loudly protesting his innocence but they never seem to put two-and-two together. Machiavelli says: "One who deceives will always find those who allow themselves to be deceived"

Richard entirely divorces politics and ethics, while protesting a need to be loved, yet really - to coin a phrase - he doesn't give a damn. And it is this that gives me pause. Throughout Machiavelli's tract, he is exhorting the Prince to take the most pragmatic action to be a good ruler, maintain a stable state, and be respected if not loved. Richard doesn't appear interested in any of these. He is, as many commentators have pointed out, a direct descendant of the Mediaeval Vice of the Morality plays (like Parolles and Iago); he seems to be evil for the sake of being evil; he positively enjoys it. Thus I don't think Shakespeare's Richard can be truly considered a Machiavellian character - there is something missing, and I think that something is the desire to be a good ruler. However, we must be careful: our most indelible perception of Richard III comes from Laurence Olivier's perception of Shakespeare's perception of what made good, safe history in a Tudor reign.

HENRY V

For me, Henry V is more a Machiavellian character than Richard. In the two parts of *Henry IV* we see him as the young, dissolute Prince Hal, carousing with Falstaff, Bardolph, Pistol et al. When Prince Hal becomes King Henry, his old cronies, depending on friendship, the glue that held the merry bunch together, expect great things. Henry, however, has become a Prince: he is able to look Falstaff straight in the face and say "Old man, I know thee not.". The exigencies of responsibility and kingship have wiped out old debts and loyalties.; he makes his choices "once and for all"; he is now committed to good laws and good arms" He suddenly puts into force Machiavelli's precept that: "It is not titles that honor men, but men that honor titles." Henry honors his title of King. Later he has no compunction at allowing the execution of Pistol for thieving; he has made a clean break with the past, prepared to appear cruel and heartless in the interests of law and stability. It is interesting to note here, that in the recent Kenneth Branagh film of Henry V, this scene where Pistol is to be hung is beautifully handled; nothing is said; nothing is asked; but for a brief moment hope flares in Pistol's eyes, only to die as soon as we register it;

and the King too allows a momentary flicker of recognition to suggest regret but both are so subtly done that we almost miss them. The transformation of Prince Hal to King Henry is exemplary Machiavelli.

Prince Hal has no hesitation in cutting all emotive ties with Falstaff and his past cronies immediately he mounts the throne. He has the ability to think and act dispassionately and for the greater good. Stephen Greenblatt describes him as ". . . a conniving hypocrite, and ... the power he both serves and comes to embody is glorified usurpation and theft; yet, at the same time, we are drawn to the celebration of both The Prince and his power" (p.30) and, interestingly, it is Prince Hal, possessing all the abilities on the Plamenatz' list, including the ability to separate politics and ethics, who is the most successful character of all those mentioned here.

JULIUS CAESAR

A.L. Rowse suggests that Shakespeare began to write *Julius Caesar* before *Henry V* was finished - internal evidence shows textual relationships and similar anachronisms in these two plays, and the eponymous protagonists have a lot of in common - almost as if in Shakespeare's mind, Julius Caesar is the mature extension of the youthful Henry.

In real life Caesar was a courageous and resolute man, exhibiting many of the aspects of *virtú* but WS goes to some lengths to weaken his character for this play - taking liberties with history much as he did with Macbeth. Shakespeare makes Caesar deaf - for which there is no historical foundation,- lets Cassius suggest Caesar is timorous : Caesar only seems like a wolf because Romans are like sheep. The real Caesar was shrewd and with foresight and insight realized that the days of republican rule were numbered in Rome and that a personal ruler was inevitable; there is little doubt that he felt he was ideally suited for the job but he also understood that it would not do to seem too eager, hence the politic refusal of the emperorship. Rowse again links Caesar's situation to that of Bolingbroke who had to take the crown from Richard II to save himself; similarly if Caesar had not crossed the Rubicon, he would have been destroyed anyway and civil war would have broken out; as it was, his assassination made civil war inevitable, but Caesar, showing remarkable insight into the political scene in Rome, had foreseen it all.

If in real life, then, Caesar was the epitome of *virtú* - why does Shakespeare undermine him? It can only be, says Rowse, to build up Brutus, which was not an easy task. Brutus was not only an assassin, he was complacent and self-congratulatory, and the man he killed was his friend, who had done much to advance him in public life; Brutus illustrates with piercing clarity the separation of ethics from politics; such ingratitude does not endear a character to the audience. So Brutus is built into a reluctant assassin, acting only out of the public interest although Rowse points out, somewhat acerbically, if Brutus had not joined the conspirators, there would have been no play because they would not have killed Caesar! Brutus was the pivot on which the whole plot depended. Caesar's death accelerates civil war, it resolves nothing because the conspirators quarrel amongst themselves and the republic falls inevitably; Brutus as the lynch pin of the conspiracy then is the cause of much greater death and destruction than might otherwise have occurred, going against Machiavelli's maxim that the infliction of death should be the minimum required to maintain a stable state, and restricted to as few victims as possible.

Thus in spite of the build-up, Brutus is not an ideal Prince. He allows Mark Anthony to live instead of getting rid of possible opposition (cf Claudius/Hamlet, Antonio/Prospero etc. previously mentioned) Brutus is an idealist who becomes involved in politics and Machiavelli makes it very clear that politics and ethics do not mix. So here, in *Julius Caesar* the play, we have examples of the Machiavellian good ruler,

Caesar, killed and replaced with an ineffectual triumvirate, led by a Machiavellian bad ruler, Brutus. We are given the opportunity of seeing positively why Machiavelli's precepts are valid, and of seeing negatively what happens when they are not adhered to.

Well, I'm running up to my allotted time and there are all those gaps - all those plays about which I haven't said anything at all: Lear, Othello, The Merchant of Venice. Because I haven't dealt with them today, does not mean there are no overtones of Machiavellian thought within them, but I thought I'd leave you the fun of looking for it yourselves!! Also, I wanted to open for your consideration some of the plays which are less often chosen for course work, such as *Coriolanus,*. I hope I have shown that there are many similarities between the guidelines set out in *The Prince* and the characters and situations in Shakespeare plays. Whether these arose as a direct influence on the dramatist from reading the politician's tract we shall never know. I think it is much more likely that the ideas now so denigrated were an integral part of late Renaissance attitudes. We cannot read Shakespeare's plays without realizing that he was at heart a conservative, who believed whole-heartedly in the stability of social structure and who had a deep mistrust of crowds and their abilities to govern themselves or anyone else. A stable, secure society was one which recognized the social hierarchy and abided with it; murder, mayhem and anarchy were the inevitable results of tampering with it. Sometimes in order to maintain this structure and stability, actions had to be taken which seemed harsh and unpopular but so long as they were undertaken out of a sincere concern for society, Shakespeare and Machiavelli both felt such actions could be justified, and understood by the people.

It is indeed fascinating that these two men, a century and half a continent apart, speaking different languages, each living through a society in transition, could hold such similar values. Perhaps a topic for class discussion could be to identify these values and find out where we lost them, or perhaps more pertinently when and why we began to misinterpret them. Why are Machiavelli's ideas attacked and misunderstood today, while those of Shakespeare himself are applauded? Why has the term "Machiavellian" become an insult? Don't we see the truths of his insight in practice around us everyday? Don't we see the separation of ethics from politics? Don't we see big business moving away from paternalism to the pragmatic, bottom line?

I have available for any member of the audience who is interested a bibliography and a sample of possible essay questions which might arise from such a consideration of these texts, although of course much will depend on which play you have chosen for your course work.

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Note: As we all know literary criticism is subject to changes of fashion, and in Shakespearean criticism the name and standing of the editor is the most important consideration in selection of a scholarly text. Until recently Arden editions held the pole position for academic thoroughness in this field, but as you can see many of their editions are elderly. Arden are just beginning to reissue some titles, with younger editors who may well have new insights to offer. However, the New Cambridge editions are excellent and they have been most supportive of the Shakespeare Resource Center (unlike Arden-Methuen)! .The Resource Center has some titles available for loan and I have a recent list of upcoming publications from Cambridge; if anyone would like to know more, please contact me at home (609) 881-0260 - I am not teaching this summer but will be in Philadelphia and could come to college at some mutually convenient time.